Speech Given to the Annual Public Meeting of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences on April 3, 1852[1]

Alexis de Tocqueville, President of the Academy

Gentlemen,

The academy in whose name I have the honor of speaking today has been exposed from birth to strange judgments; her very reason for being has been contested. It is willingly admitted that the actions of the private man ought to be subject to a permanent rule, and that morality is a science. But is it the same for those collections of men one calls societies? Is there a science of politics? It has hitherto been denied, and, oddly enough, it has generally been political men, that is to say, the very ones who ought naturally to practice this science, who have taken such liberties with it. They have sometimes permitted themselves to call it chimerical or at least vain.

There is something rather puerile, they have said, in imagining that there is a particular art that teaches one to govern. The field of politics is too varied and volatile to permit one to place there the foundations of a science. The facts[2] that would constitute its matter never have anything but a false and deceptive resemblance to one another. The epoch in which they take place, the condition of the peoples in which one observes them, the character of the men who produce them or who submit to them renders them so profoundly dissimilar that it can only be useful to consider each of them separately. The prince who tried to govern his people with the aid of theories and maxims formed[3] while studying

philosophy and history would turn out very poorly; it is to be believed that simple good sense would have been of greater use to him.

Such is the rather condescending language I have sometimes heard used by political men regarding the sciences whose subject is politics and regarding those who cultivate them.

I have always found them to be greatly in the wrong.[4]

There are two parts of politics that must not be confused, one fixed and the other in motion.

The first, founded on the very nature of man, on his interests, on his faculties, on his needs as revealed by philosophy and history, on his instincts, which change their objects according to the times without changing their nature, and which are as immortal as his race; the first, I say, teaches us what laws are best adapted to the general and permanent condition of humanity.

All this is the science.

And then there is a practical and militant politics that struggles against the difficulties of each day, adapting to the variety of incidents, providing for the passing needs of the moment, and calling to its aid the ephemeral passions of contemporaries.

This is the art of government.

The art assuredly differs from the science, practice is often removed from theory, I do not deny it; I would go even farther, if desired, and make this concession, admitting that, in my judgment, to excel at one is no reason at all to succeed in the other. I do not know, gentlemen, whether, in a country that has counted among its great publicists and its great writers so many eminent statesmen, it is even permitted to say that to make fine books, even on politics or things connected to it, prepares one quite poorly for the government of men and the management of affairs. I permit myself, however, to believe and to think that these eminent writers who showed themselves to be at the same time statesmen have shone in affairs not because they were illustrious authors, but despite being so.

Indeed, the art of writing suggests, to those who have practiced it for a long time, habits of mind hardly favorable to the conduct of affairs. It enslaves them to the logic of ideas, when the crowd never obeys any logic save that of the passions. It gives them the taste for the fine, the delicate, the ingenious, the original, when it is coarse commonplaces that lead the world.

Even the study of history, which often enlightens the field of present facts, sometimes obscures it. How many men would one not encounter among us who, with minds surrounded by a learned darkness, saw 1640 in 1789 and 1688 in

1830,[5] and, always behind by one revolution, wanted to apply to the second the remedy for the first, like those medical doctors who, completely up to date on previous maladies of the human body, but always ignorant of the particular and new ill from which their patient suffers, hardly fail to kill him with erudition! I have sometimes heard it regretted that Montesquieu lived in a time when he could not experiment with the politics whose science he advanced so much. I have always found much indiscretion in these regrets; perhaps the rather subtle finesse of his mind would often have made him miss in practice precisely that point by which the success of affairs is decided; he might well have been able to succeed at becoming the rarest of publicists, while being a rather poor minister, a thing that is very common.

We recognize therefore, gentlemen, that political science and the art of governing are two very distinct things. But does it follow that political science does not exist or that it is vain?

If I seek for what prevents certain minds from perceiving this science, I find that it is its very grandeur. The science that treats of the conduct of societies covers, indeed, an immense space extending from philosophy to the elementary studies of civil justice. Being almost without limits, it forms but a single object to the view. One confuses it with all the knowledge connected directly or indirectly to man, and in this immensity one loses sight of it.

But when we apply ourselves to the attentive consideration of this great science, when we remove whatever touches it without adhering to it, then the diverse parts that really compose it appear, and we finish by forming (*se faire*) a clear idea of the whole. We then see that this science descends by degrees from the general to the particular, and from pure theory to written laws and to facts.

For those who consider it in this way, the authors who are famous for cultivating it cease to form a confused crowd; they are divided into very distinct groups each of which can be examined separately. Some, with the aid of detailed accounts of history, or the abstract study of man, seek out the natural rights belonging to the body social and the rights exercised by the individual, what laws best fit societies according to the forms these have received from birth or adopted, and what systems of government are applicable according to the case, the place, the time. These are the publicists: Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Rousseau, to cite but a few brilliant names.

Others attempt the same labor with respect to that society of nations of which each people is a citizen, a society that is always rather barbarous, even in the most civilized centuries, whatever effort is made to soften and regulate the relations of

those who compose it. They discover and indicate what international law is, beyond particular treaties. This is the work of Grotius and Pufendorf.

Others still, while preserving the general and theoretical character of political science, confine themselves to a single part of the vast subject they embrace: this is Beccaria establishing what the rules of criminal justice ought to be among all peoples; this is Adam Smith attempting to find the foundation of the wealth of nations.

Thus we arrive, always constricting our sphere, at the jurists and great commentators: Cujas, Domat, Pothier, and all those who interpret and clarify existing institutions, treaties, constitutions, and laws.

To the extent that we have descended from ideas to facts, the field of political science narrows and becomes firmer; but it is always the same science. One can be convinced of this if one compares all the authors who occupied themselves with the different matters we have just indicated, and if one remarks that, however far they seem to be from one another, they nonetheless lend one another a hand and aid one another constantly. There is not a commentator who has not often supported himself on the abstract and general truths that the publicists have found, and the latter constantly need to found their theory on the particular facts and the institutions of our experience that the commentators have revealed or described.

But I am astonished, gentlemen, to have to demonstrate the existence of the political sciences in a country where their power shines forth in every direction. You deny the political sciences and what they are capable of doing? Look around you: see these monuments, see these ruins! Who raised the former, who made (*a fait*) the latter? Who has changed the face of the world of our day to the point that, if your grandfather could be born again, he would recognize neither the laws, nor the mores, nor the ideas, nor the customs, nor the usages that he knew; and hardly the language that he spoke? Who, in a word, has produced this French Revolution, the greatest event in history? I say the greatest and not the most useful, for this revolution still endures, and I await its last effect in order to characterize it with such a word; but finally, who has produced it? Was it the political men of the eighteenth century, the princes, the ministers, the great lords? We need neither bless nor curse them; we must instead pity them, for they have almost always done other than they wanted to do, and finished by achieving a result they detested. The great artisans of this fearsome revolution were precisely the only men of those times who had never taken the least part in public affairs. It was authors of whom no one is ignorant, it was the most abstract science that

deposited in the spirit of our fathers those seeds of novelties from which sprouted suddenly so many political institutions and civil laws unknown to their ancestors.

And note that whatever the political sciences have done here with such irresistible power and such marvelous brilliance, they do everywhere and always, though more secretly and slowly; among all civilized peoples, the political sciences give birth to, or at least form[6], those general ideas from which then emerge the particular facts in whose midst men of politics busy themselves, and the laws they believe they invent; these ideas form around each society something like a sort of intellectual atmosphere breathed by the spirit of both governed and governors, and from which the former as well as the latter draw, often without knowing it, sometimes without wanting it, the principles of their conduct. Barbarians are the only ones who recognize in politics nothing but practice.

Our Academy, gentlemen, has for her mission the furnishing to these sciences, so necessary and so fearsome, of a hearth and a rule.[7] She ought to cultivate them in full liberty, but never to depart from them, reminding herself always that she is a learned society, and not a political body. The dignity of her labors depends on it.

This is anyhow what she has always done, and one asks nothing of her now but that she remain in agreement with herself. Always the Academy has taken care to hold herself at a distance from parties, in that serene region of pure theory and abstract science. Not only has she enclosed herself there, but she has made a constant effort to attract and retain there those spirits whom the passions of the moment and the clamor of affairs would constantly have distracted. The subjects she has proposed for her contests attest to this, and the contest itself that we are going to judge today succeeds in proving it.

The first question she proposed was this: “Compare the moral and political philosophy of Plato and Aristotle with the doctrines of the greatest modern philosophers on the same matters. Appraise what is temporary and false, and what is true and immortal in these different systems.”

The path thus opened is immense; it contains almost the entire history of the moral and political sciences; now, of all the sciences, it is these with which the human spirit is most immediately and most constantly occupied. A study so old and so sustained must have produced an almost infinite number of different notions and diverse systems. To summarize this immense labor of the intelligence and to judge it seems a work that not only surpasses the limits of an article, but also those of a book. Indeed, the enterprise is difficult; yet it is not impracticable.

There is this great difference, among many others, between the physical sciences and the moral sciences: that the field of the first is almost without boundaries, since it has no boundaries save those of nature, while the latter

sciences are contained within the study of a single subject, man; and as much as this unique object changes a great deal in aspect according to the individual and the times, and while the half-darkness that always surrounds it also lends itself to all sorts of illusions and errors, nonetheless the number of mother-ideas these sciences have produced is not as great as one might think, considering all those who have been occupied with them.

It is incredible how often moral and political systems have been successively found, forgotten, found again, forgotten once more only to reappear a little later, always charming or surprising the world as if they were new, attesting to the ignorance of men, and not to the fecundity of the human spirit.

Perhaps it is permissible to apply to the moral and political sciences what Mme de Sévigné said so agreeably of love, that "*il est un grand recommenceur*."[8] Indeed, it often happens that they repeat what they had already said in another manner. They offer a small number of truths that are not very old, and few errors that do not appear decrepit if one knows the date of their birth. Thus these makers of social theories whom we see in our day, and who seem to us, with reason, to be so dangerous, would appear all the more boring had we more erudition and more memory.

It is therefore possible, in studying the most illustrious authors that have treated of the moral and political sciences in different centuries, to find out what are in these matters the principal ideas that have had currency among humankind, to reduce them into a rather small number of systems, and then to compare them to each other and judge them. In any case, the difficulty of this task appears to have frightened the spirit of the contestants. One alone has presented himself: his work has attracted the serious attention of the Academy, and merits it; nonetheless he has not been able to induce her to award the prize this year. She hopes that new contestants will present themselves, and above all that the author of the only article that has been entrusted to her can himself perfect the already remarkable work he has submitted. She therefore remits the question to the competition of 1853. All those who cultivate these noble studies whose object is man and society shall doubtlessly think, the Academy hopes, that if there are few subjects as difficult to treat as that which she has proposed, there is none more grand and more beautiful.

The section on legislation has likewise posed this question: "What are, from the juridical and philosophic points of view, the reforms to which our civil procedure is open?"

You see here, gentlemen, that the horizon is contracting. This latter subject is as particular as the former was general. It is concerned not with the man, but with

the litigant.

Procedure, we must recall, is not in high honor with the public; we often permit ourselves to confuse it with chicanery. It would be better nonetheless were it revered, and we are wrong to judge it by the abuses made of it; for without procedure the judge and the litigant act without rule in all that precedes and follows judgment, and the domain of law remains, in the best case, an empire of the arbitrary. Now, arbitrary justice is the very stamp of barbarism; thus civilized peoples have always attached a great importance to the rules of procedure.

Free peoples, above all, have always been great proceduralists; they have drawn in good part from forms for the defense of their liberty, and one has seen them oppose power more advantageously with the thousand little formalities procedure furnishes than with the general rights guaranteed by the constitution, just as it often happens that neighbors of the sea succeed better at preventing its ravages by sowing reeds upon its banks, with whose aid they divide and slow down its surges, than by raising high dikes to contain it. This part of the laws, so important, has nonetheless remained the most imperfect.

Those innovators who, for the last sixty years, have transformed everything in France, have, despite their longings, hardly modified the laws relative to the administration of civil justice. Napoleon himself ran aground here. All efforts combined have ended only by changing the position, but not the nature, of the laws. We have done nothing with the ordinances of our ancient kings but transport them into our codes. Thus I have always thought it a slight exaggeration to say that among us nothing is free from revolutions, since civil procedure has been; it is to be believed that it will retain this rare privilege until some great writer does for it what Filangieri and Beccaria did for criminal procedure, drawing it from the dust and the obscurity of the studies and the court offices, exposing it to the light of day, and succeeding at removing it from the prejudiced interests of practice and submitting it to the general notions of philosophy and good sense.

This is what the Academy has tried to do in posing the questions indicated, and ten contestants have responded to her appeal.

Three articles have merited her praise; the goal has been approached, but it has not yet been reached, and the Academy judges, by the articles that have been transmitted to her, by the importance of the subject, and by the hope that one must conceive of the utility of the labors she has provoked, that it is best to remit the question to the contest of 1853.

Three prizes were proposed for this year. The Academy regrets that she must refuse the first two. She is pleased to be able to award the third.

This prize has been obtained by M. Bodin, doctor of law, advocate for the Paris Court of Appeal. The question that prompted M. Bodin's article, or rather his book—for the work of which we will speak has the extent and the merit of a great treatise on its subject—was this: "Seek the origin of judicial order[9] in France, tracing its history and shedding light upon the principles of its current organization."

All peoples, gentlemen, ought to be interested in the history and the constitution of justice; for the judicial power is possibly, all things considered, the one with the most influence on the daily conditions of each citizen.

But do we not have, as Frenchmen, particular reasons to inquire into what justice has been among us? When I seek for the two classes of men who have most contributed to forming the traits of our national character, I find that they are writers and magistrates.

The first have given to the French spirit that temperament at once vigorous and delicate that we see in ourselves, that nature so curious, audacious, restive, often factious and always intractable, which acts incessantly in Europe and in our own midst. The second have bequeathed to us judicial mores, a certain respect for individual independence, and a persevering taste for forms and judicial guarantees, which we follow even in the midst of the disorders of revolutions and the indifference that succeeds them.

To make a history of literature and justice in France is to seek the origins of ourselves.

M. Bodin has acquitted himself very remarkably of this task in all that concerns justice. He traces for us the vicissitudes of judicial order in France from the Romans to our day. The details, perhaps a bit numerous, which fill this vast tableau, do not in any case impede us from grasping the ensemble, and the general view here is imposing. The historical part of this article is therefore very worthy of our praise. The philosophical portion of the work is not equal to the other and harms it slightly. It is much easier indeed to describe well than to judge well. The Academy would also have liked to find more brilliance in the thought and more color in the style. It seems that the author is a better draftsman than grand painter. But his work remains nonetheless a noble (*beau*) one that gives honor as much to the one who produced it as to the learned body that inspired it.

After having judged the articles that competed in 1851, the Academy has had to occupy herself with choosing new subjects. Two are indicated by her this year. The first has been furnished by the section on philosophy: it concerns one of the most mysterious phenomena that can be presented by this being so full of mysteries that one calls man.

What is sleep? What essential difference is there between dreaming and thinking? Does artificial sleepwalking, which so to speak is nothing but the perfection or utilization of dreaming, exist? What is this singular state during which several faculties of the human spirit seem rather enlarged than restrained, save the first of them all: the will, which here remains blind or subordinated? Can one account for these phenomena according to the rules of a sound philosophical method?

The second question posed this year interests at once the family and society. The Academy asks us to examine from a moral and economic point of view the best regime to which marriage contracts can be submitted.

You know, gentlemen, that M. le Baron Félix de Beaujour has established a quinquennial prize for the author of the best book on the relief of poverty.

The book that the Academy demands of contestants this year is a manual of morals and political economy for the use of the working classes.

All times have seen laborers and the poor; but what seems peculiar to our own is the opinion, so widespread in our day, that there exists somewhere a remedy for this hereditary and incurable sickness of poverty and labor, and that with a little good will governors might easily succeed at discovering it. We are prepared to accord to each power that is born a reasonable time to find and apply this new medicine, and, if it fails, we are ever ready to chase this practitioner out and call upon another doctor. Experiments follow and generations succeed one another without this error dissipating, and we have come to believe that the same chimera will always traverse the same ruins.

The Academy, in posing the question I am going to announce, has had for her end the combating of this false idea from which evils flow. She desires, to this effect, that the contestants apply themselves to spreading among the working classes to whom they address themselves some of the most elementary and certain notions of political economy; that they make it well understood, for example, that there is something permanent and necessary in the economic laws that govern the rates of wages; why these laws, being in some sense of divine right, since they emerge from the nature of man and the very structure of society, are placed beyond the reach of revolutions; and that the government cannot make wages rise when the demand for labor diminishes, just as no one can prevent water from spilling over the rim of a leaning glass.

But what the Academy desires above all is that the different authors she provokes set in light this truth: that the principle remedy of poverty is found in the poor man himself, in his activity, his frugality, his forward-thinking; in the good and intelligent employment of his faculties, far more than those of others; and finally that, if man owes his well-being somewhat to the laws, he owes it far more to himself; moreover, one could say that to himself alone is he beholden, for as much as the citizen is worth, so much is the law worth.

Is it not strange, gentlemen, that a truth so simple and so clear has ceaselessly needed to be restored, and that it seems so obscure in our times and among our lights? Alas! It is easy to say the cause: mathematical truths for their demonstration require only observations and facts; but to grasp and believe moral truths it is necessary to have [good] mores.

The Academy asks of its contestants not a treatise but a manual, which is to say that she invites them to make a work that is short, practical, and within the reach of all; in fine, one which is written for the people, yet without the pretense of reproducing the language of the people, a kind of affectation contrary to any diffusion of the truth among the inferior classes that could be sought by a noble (*bel*) spirit. The importance that she attaches to this little book is manifested by the prize of ten thousand francs she promises to him who shall be its author. But she announces in advance that she will award this prize only if there emerges from the contest a work that is remarkable and suited to fulfill the need she has conceived.

I stop here, gentlemen; it is time to cede the floor to the permanent secretary, who is going to speak to us of one of our colleagues whose loss we regret and whose memory we venerate, M. Droz. To praise his writings and retrace his actions is neither to emerge from the circle of our studies nor to fail in our grand mission; for honesty shows itself better by example than by precept, and the best course in morals—and I beg the pardon of my colleagues in the section on philosophy—shall always be the life of a good man retraced by a historian who understands and makes known the love of virtue.

Appendix

Our Academy, gentlemen, has this for her mission: to be the hearth and regulator of these necessary and fearsome sciences; this is her glory, but it is also her peril.

Governments are generally indifferent enough to what happens in the bosom of academies, and even, in ordinary times, in the world of ideas. When we are occupied with nothing but literature, philosophy, science, and even with religion, they willingly believe that these do not touch on anything else. But as soon as we speak of politics in any of its parts, they become very attentive. They imagine that we do not act upon politics except when we speak about it. Yet do not believe, gentlemen, that this is merely the failing of those petty souls who generally lead human affairs. The most noble (*beaux*) geniuses have fallen here. There are

philosophic or religious opinions that have changed the face of empires and that were born beside the greatest men without their having taken any notice. It is to be believed that if these same princes had heard their subjects discussing a question of communal roads they would have been all eyes and ears.

An academy of moral and political sciences is therefore not, it is necessary to recognize, equally appropriate to every country and to every time. Her place is hardly anywhere but in free countries and places where the discussion of everything is permitted. These are conditions of existence with which we are honored, gentlemen; let us not contest them.

The *ancien régime*, which treated the moral and political sciences like an ingenious and respectable occupation of the human spirit, never permitted those who cultivated them to unite in an academy. The revolutionary dictatorship, which of all dictatorships is the greatest enemy of liberty, stifled these sciences, and, as the sole efficacious means of preventing writings treating of them, suppressed as much as possible their authors: almost all that remained of the old eighteenth century school, Bailly, Condorcet, Malesherbes, perished by its hands. One may believe that the same fate would have befallen Montesquieu, Voltaire, Turgot, and Rousseau himself, had they then lived. Happily for them, they were dead before they could see the frightening times for which one holds them responsible. But scarcely had the Terror ceased when the moral and political sciences immediately returned to great honor, and were, it must be said, the object of an unjust preference; for in the creation of the Institute which then took place, a separate division was made for them, while one was refused to *belles-lettres*: strange ingratitude of a generation that literature had nourished and conducted into power!

The revolution continued on its course, but liberty soon returned to the rear: for revolution and liberty are two words it is necessary to hold carefully apart in history. The First Consul—who personified and continued the French Revolution in his own manner, but who was nothing less than the greatest adversary liberty has yet encountered in the world—this First Consul did not delay in casting a very evil eye upon the Academy, or, as it was then called, the Division of Moral and Political Sciences. The Academy was then composed, it is true, almost exclusively of political men who had played various roles in the preceding events. One counted there Cabanis, Daunou, Merlin de Douai, Dupont de Nemours, Cessac, Roederer, Sieyès, Talleyrand, Lebrun (later Duke of Plaisance), and Destutt-Tracey. She had for a foreign associate the illustrious Jefferson, then president of the United States of America, which was no great title of recommendation with the First Magistrate of the Republic of France. Yet despite being composed of famous persons, she tended only to make herself forgotten;

seeing the spirit of her master, which was no longer contained by the spirit of the times, she withdrew voluntarily into the obscurity of her own sphere; one sees this well in perusing her final works.

In philosophic history, she was occupied with the government of France under the first two dynasties; this did not seem bound to compromise her. Nonetheless, for more innocence yet, she believed it necessary to go back even to the Pharaohs; one finds her employing her last meetings to listen to M. de Volney, who, according to the minutes, was charged with sharing interesting information about the tunics of Egyptian mummies.

In morals, M. Dupont de Nemours read his articles on instinct, which, being common to beast and man, could hardly disquiet the government.

In political economy, the Academy was occupied with the daily growth and diminution of the Seine.

And in politics properly so-called, she was occupied with nothing.

The public treated the Academy a bit like it treated itself: she no longer attracted serious ideas from outside or acted upon them within her own bosom. One sees nothing in her final minutes other than the title of a single work of some length to which she paid homage: *Course on Morals for the Use of Young Ladies*, by Citizen Almaric.

None of this could appear fearsome, and yet the First Consul became preoccupied with her. The Academy had rendered herself very small, but the eye of Napoleon perceived her despite the darkness into which she had cast herself.

When Napoleon had effaced the last vestiges of public liberty—or, as he put it, abolished government by lawyers—he wanted to close the last asylum of free thinkers—or ideologues as he called them, forgetting that without these ideologues, who had prepared the ruin of the *ancien régime*, and without these lawyers who had consummated its ruin, he would never have become the master of France and of Europe, but would doubtless have remained, despite his genius, an obscure and petty gentleman, lost in the thousand inferior ranks of the hierarchy they had destroyed.

I have searched very attentively in many diverse documents, and notably in the administrative documents deposited in the national archives, seeking just how this destruction of the division on moral and political sciences took place; I have found nothing worthy of consideration. By reading these documents one sees only that it is not in parliamentary governments alone that those who lead affairs give themselves the trouble of hiding their true thoughts in a multiplicity of words. However all-powerful they proclaim themselves to be, despotic governments dispense no more than others with this ruse. They condescend at other times to

the use of deception. In the report of the minister of the interior, Chaptal, the report preceding the decree, a copy of which I found corrected by the hand of the minister himself, not a single word is said on the reasons for suppressing the Division of Moral and Political Sciences. No critique, no insinuations against her: it is not even said that she is being suppressed; all that is contemplated is the reform of the Institute in accordance with a better plan and the introduction within her of a division of labor more favorable to the interests of letters and of the sciences. In reading the considerations behind this decree, it seems that no thought has even been given to us. In reading the decree itself, one perceives that we no longer exist, and that we have been killed gently through omission.

Likewise, one sees in the report that the original idea of the minister was, purely and simply, to return to the old academic organization, not only as to things, but also as to names; in one word, to do in 1803 what Louis XVIII did in 1816: to re-fasten the chains of time, as he himself later said. The First Consul accepted the thing, but rejected the words. M. de Fontanes, who remained very much in love with the past, and who was, to use the modern jargon, a great reactionary, pressed him to give again to these sections the name Academy; we are assured that he responded to him, “No! Not the Academy! That would be too Bourbon!”

Thus ended the Division of Moral and Political Sciences. She was buried, like all other public liberties, wrapped in the flag of Marengo. At least it was a glorious shroud.

One does not see her reborn until the French once again become free.

Even in the most favorable times, the Academy is placed between two reefs. She must equally fear going beyond her sphere and remaining inactive within it.

We ought never to forget, gentlemen, that we are a learned society and not a political body: the security and the dignity of our labors depend upon it.

This line of demarcation between theory and practice is, one must admit, easier to trace than to hold. A question that at first glance seems purely theoretical can, in response to the passions of the moment, turn easily into a question of facts and an instrument of parties; for we are a reasoning and noble-spirited (*bel esprit*) people among whom one willingly makes the most subtle theories serve for the satisfaction of the most coarse appetites, and often wraps rather villainous actions in the most noble (*beaux*) words. There are political matters that naturally pertain to practice and others that are occasionally drawn toward it; the Academy has known how to avoid, with a reserve that does her honor, both the one and the other. She has held firm to the sphere of theory. She has done more: she has

striven to draw spirits there; if she has not always succeeded, there is no need to be astonished.

One might believe that in a time when all men take part in governing, the abstract science of government will be cultivated most and best. The contrary would be closer to the truth. The greatest publicists who have appeared in the world have preceded or followed ages of public liberty. Aristotle wrote of the republic from the court of Alexander; *The Spirit of the Laws* and *The Social Contract* were composed under absolute monarchy. These books have made (*fait*) us what we are, but we would probably be incapable of making them today. Facts incessantly depart from ideas and practice from science, and politics ends by being nothing but a game of chance: one in which the dice are loaded.

It is with the end of attracting toward speculative politics those spirits who would be distracted by the clamor of parties and the care of affairs that the Academy has established contests and distributed annual prizes to those writers who distinguish themselves therein. To judge these contests, and distribute these prizes, is the object that has united us today.

Notes

1. Previously published, in a translation by J. P. Mayer, as "The Art & Science of Politics: An Unpublished Speech," in *Encounter* 36:1 (January, 1971). The present translation is based on the speech proper as presented in the first volume of Tocqueville's *Oeuvres*, Edition Pléade, A. Jardin (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 1215-1226; and on the Appendix included in volume IX of Gustave de Beaumont's edition of Tocqueville's *Oeuvres* (Paris: Michel-Lévy Frères, 1866), 643-647. I have striven to render Tocqueville's French as literally as possible while employing English that is grammatically correct and stylistically tolerable. Brian Danoff and Elena Hebert assisted me in improving this translation; any remaining deficiencies are mine.

2. Here and throughout the text, "fact" translates the French "*fait*," which can mean either "fact" or "act." The latter meaning should not be dismissed, since the facts upon which political science focuses concern the actions (*les actions*) of men.

3. Here and elsewhere, the verb "form" is "*se faire*," containing the root of "*fait*" (see note 2 above). One of the actions of men—in their public or governing as well as private capacity—is to theorize about human action; political science must therefore study itself.

4. Tocqueville's expression, "*avoir grand tort*," is suggestive of both error and injury.

5. Tocqueville refers to the English Civil War, the French Revolution, the "Glorious" Revolution in England, and the July Revolution in France, respectively.

6. The word "form," used twice in this paragraph, translates "*donnent la forme aux*" and "*forment*," respectively.

7. Here Tocqueville omitted to read a portion of his speech, which is reproduced in the Appendix below. Four months earlier, Louis Napoleon had staged a successful *coup d'état*.

8. "It is a great beginner-again."

9. "*L'ordre judiciaire*" refers to courts in the normal order of procedure.